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The Politics of Titles

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The Politics Of Titles

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In recent years, studies on the Black experience have revealed that Black people, the world over, suffer from a number of psychologically debilitating experiences. These experiences range from the issues of self-denial, lack of racial pride, lack of self-fulfillment to the issues of dependency complex.

These experiences are the byproducts of what is generally known as "cultural contacts." The uprooting of Blacks from Africa and their colonization in the continent have, in fact, turned them into modern racial and social schizophrenics.

I. The Afro-American Experience

The current of protest by the Afro-American community for human rights has, over the years, taken different forms. At given times, the protest has taken a purely religious bent. At other times, it has been a purely political expression. At still other times, it has been a blend of both religious and political agitation. Depending upon the prevailing socio-economic conditions and the times, the methods of protest have been either violent or non-violent.

At the same time, the leaders who have spearheaded this protest have, by extension, reflected the same degree of heterogeneity. Though their ultimate goals have essentially been identical, their organizational tactics for mobilization have, by virtue of their social backgrounds, been equally varied.

Some have preached the return to a millenarian homeland. Others have made use of such tactics as free meals. Still others have advocated the erection of an independent state. Finally, there have been those who have resorted to a politico-military art program. Crowning most of these tactics has been the addition of titles. The use of these titles, to be fully comprehended, must be viewed as a countervailing process between antinomic poles.

Titles and the White Presence

The 1960s civil rights package has been called, rightly or wrongly, the Second Emancipation Charter. The First Emancipation Charter (1865)—made inoperative by the enactment of Jim Crow laws—failed to guarantee both the political and civil rights of the Afro-American community.

The whites who considered the Afro-American as an unassimilable merchandise because he came from a different racial and cultural background sought, at all costs, to keep him away from the mainstream of the American society. The Afro-American became then "a nation within a nation."

In the process of the fight against this second class status, leaders from the Afro-American community chose their means of struggle not only on the basis of their ability to deliver physical gains but also on the basis of their psychological rehabilitation force. Uplifting the Afro-American community required concomitantly proving to the white community that the members of the Afro-American community were equally capable of enjoying all of the social trappings brought along by higher status symbols.

Frantz Fanon argued in *The Wretched of the Earth,* the importance of any form of struggle against the oppressing group lies at two levels. The first is the purely physical level: delivery from subjugation. The second is the level of psychological reward: fighting the oppressor by any means reinforces the oppressed's conviction about his own manhood, in that it helps him in ridding his psyche of all that which the image of the oppressor stands for.[1] This reassertion of manhood becomes, subsequently, the passport to all that which can be rightly termed "forbidden fruits of the past." Titles enter into this category.

At the height of the Pan-African struggle in the early 1900s, Marcus Garvey exerted himself to demonstrate to the white community that, like any other American, the Afro-American had a homeland he could boast about (Africa). Thus his grandiose scheme of liberating Africa and setting up that great Pan-African state where Afro-Americans could resettle. At the same time, he went all out to convince the Afro-American community that it too, like the white community, could produce leaders with the necessary qualities, and appropriate social titles.

With this in mind, Garvey launched the largest mass movement of protest ever witnessed in the United States. The movement expressed its specific organizational form in these two entities: The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the African Communities Imperial League (ACIL). In close correspondence with the nature and aims of each of

these two associations, Garvey took respectively the titles of "President-General and Administrator" and "Provisional President of Africa."

George Padmore's comments in this regard are most elucidating: "As head of the African empire to be, his official title was "His Higness, the Potentate"—After the provisional government had been approved and sworn in, Garvey conferred peerages and knighthoods upon them—The Black dignitaries, the first of the nobility of the "Negro Empire" were graced with such high sounding titles as, Duke of the Nile, Earl of the Congo, Viscount of the Niger, and Baron of Zambesi—Others were Knights of the Distinguished Service Order of Ethiopia, Ashanti, and Mozambique." [2]

Also, during these early parts of the 1900s, a number of Afro-Americans who had views other than the proposals and aims of Garvey's back-to-Africa movement sought to shackle off their traumatizing experience of second class status by using different organizational avenues, such as the church, fraternal benevolent associations like the Masons, the Elks, the Eastern Stars, and the Shriners. According to St. Clair Drake, the Black church along with these fraternal associations have been the main avenues for the self-expression of the Afro-American community.[3]

Starting with Richard Allen's breakaway in Philadelphia, the Afro-American community has tended to pattern and gear most of its activities towards that irresistible need for recognition by the white community. Sometimes even, these activities transcended the normal value standards set up by the white community as an overcompensatory mechanism. At other times, it counterreacted to these standards and found substitutes for them.

Within this contextual framework, arose a new movement organized by George Baker. In its initial phase, this movement, like Garvey's, carried revitalization overtones. It aimed at assisting the Afro-American in regaining his dignity by pressing for racial equality. However, unlike Garvey's movement which was fundamentally a political expression of protest, Baker's movement took on an equally religious tone. This tone turned it, as a result, into a kind of millenarian cult movement.

Baker—following in the footsteps of his mentor, the Rev. Samuel Morris, who had proclaimed himself "Father Eternal" in a Baltimore church in 1907—proclaimed himself the "Messenger of God" in Valdosta, Georgia, in 1914. Later, he moved to New York after he was expelled from Valdosta by the city authorities. "After a good meal," writes Sara Harris, "the Messenger would address the gathered group, followers, and visitors, made up almost entirely of colored domestics. He talked about racial equality, stating that he had come from another world to achieve it. Where Garvey had said that Black was basically superior, the Messenger exemplified that statement. He said: I am a Negro and God dwells in me. You are a Negro and you are like into me. Therefore, you are superior to white." [4]

In its second phase, Baker's movement in keeping with the composition of its biracial membership, simply turned into an evangelical revivalist organization. In close association with both this new image and its new emphasis on peace and brotherhood within the family of man, the movement became known as Peace Mission. Through free meals, it was able to enlarge its following; Baker bestowed upon himself the title of "Father Divine, i.e. The Providence or God." This led John Hoshor to write: "Some people seek happiness in power, some in greed, some in sex, liquor or narcotics, many seek it in despair. Go out and make 2,000,000 people happy today, free them from all worry, stuff them with fried chicken, candied sweet potatoes and pie, then let them sing, shout, and enjoy themselves to their hearts content, they will call you God and mean it. Neither laughter nor wonder then that millions of Negroes and a few whites shout! Father Divine is God!" [5]

Within the context of race relations, the significance of this evangelical organization lay in the fact that Baker's position as leader and his titles stood as a clear signal to the Black followers that an Afro-American could lead white people as well.

At the very moment when Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement had reached its apotheosis, the nativistic and revitalization movement known as The Temple of Islam or the Nation of Islam started to make its debut. Partly because its future constituency was bred into the Judaeo-Christian teachings, and partly because it hoped to bring new beams of freedom and dignity to the Afro-American, its leader, W. D. Fard, took the title of Prophet.

In his dealings with his followers, not only did Fard make it clear that Islam was the true religion of the Black man, but he also pressed the idea that "he had been sent by Allah to bring freedom, justice and equality to the Black man in the wilderness of North America surrounded and robbed completely by the cave man." [6]

At Fard's death, one of the earliest officers in the movement, Elijah Muhammad, born Elijah Poole, took over as Supreme Minister of the Nation of Islam. After he moved to Chicago and reorganized the movement, following outbreaks of serious squabbles in Detroit, he began to be referred to both as the Prophet and more often the Messenger of Allah.

In an effort to impress his less educated followers, Muhammad, like Garvey resorted to an array of social etiquettes commensurate with his titles of Prophet, Messenger of Allah and Supreme Minister of the Nation of Islam, including rituals and styles of greeting. For instance, during the Muslim annual convention, the chair which the Messenger occupied was green. He was flanked by the Supreme Captain, two or more of his sons, and by a few ministers. Ministers from many temples spoke in praise of the Messenger's work among his people.[7] During a Saviour's Day in 1956, in particular, Muhammad's appearance was described on the printed program as follows: "3 p.m.—Royal entrance of the Messenger, Honorable Elijah Muhammad—A new Leader of the Day." [8] At the final session of the 1960 annual convention, Minister Malcolm X asked the

audience to remain seated while the Messenger was leaving the hall and pleaded: "Please pay the same respect to this Black man, you know who loves you, that you would pay to the President of the United States who you think, loves you." [9]

Largely because he had succeeded in building a tightly knit organization where his word had the force of law, Muhammad, too, succeeded in preparing ways for a smooth transition on his death. In this way, his son Wallace D. Muhammad took over the reins of the Nation of Islam, along with the title of Supreme Minister.

The wave of reforms that Wallace D. Muhammad has initiated, such as the opening of the membership to Caucasians, are pragmatic moves designed to cope with the changing political scene of the American nation.

However, whether under Wallace D. Fard, Elijah Muhammad or Wallace D. Muhammad, the title of Supreme Minister must not simply be viewed as a religious etiquette but also as a political expression of self-determination and independence. The Nation of Islam becomes then a "political" nation within the "political" nation of the United States of America. As such, this title carried more degree of political realism than the titles taken by the members of the Black Panther Party.

Founded in October 1966, in Oakland, California, by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party was fundamentally and intrinsically a political organization committed to the gaining of justice for the Afro-American community.

First and foremost in the Panthers enemy list were the white policemen whom "they regarded as the official representatives of the Status Quo and the Establishment, who permitted and used violence against Black people." [10]

As any other organization of protest, the Black Panthers sought to achieve their main objective of justice for the Afro-American community by erecting themselves into a revolutionary political party bent on striking a solid marriage between a Marxist program and a policy of "guns and butter." In point of fact, the original name of the organization was the "Black Panther Party for Self-Defense." [11]

In keeping with both the nature of the organization and the aims of the party program (a 10-point platform), Seale bestowed upon himself the title of "Party Chairman." Although this title conformed to political reality—a political party usually has a chairman—the titles of "Minister of Defense" taken by Newton, and "Minister of Information" bestowed upon Eldridge Cleaver and of "Prime Minister" given to Stokely Carmichael were a clear example of political distortion.[12]

As a rule, a political party does not bestow such honorific labels upon its members until and unless it becomes a ruling party in power. Had the Black Panther Party, like the Nation of Islam, declared itself and set itself up into a self-determined nation within the political nation of the United States of America, then, and only then, would these titles have carried a higher degree of political realism, although it could still be argued that these titles were in keeping with the idea and aim of community control—all of the Black neighborhoods controlled by the organization would have then formed a self-determined political unit.

As it was, political reality would have been served best if Newton had taken or was given the title of "Party Secretary for the Defense of Black Neighborhoods," Cleaver the title of "Party Secretary for Information," and Carmichael the title of "Party Executive Secretary."

Whether inflated or not, the titles used by the leaders of these different Afro-American organizations (purely religious, cultist or political)—denote a certain assertive effort for independence from the American power structure, in addition to serving as leadership and mobilization tools. Far more fundamental however, is that in close contrast with the leaders of organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League who have tended to make use of tradition-bound and tradition-set social labels (Executive Secretary, Director, Chariman . . .) the leaders of organizations such as UNIA, Peace Mission, Nation of Islam, and Black Panther Party rather tended to capitalize on catch-eye and distinction-bound social symbols (President, Prophet, Supreme Minister, Prime Minister).

What accounts for the difference is that while organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League have zeroed in on the "cream" of the Afro-American community in their membership drives, UNIA, Father Divine Peace Mission, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panthers have recruited most of their followers from the rank of the uneducated and the downtrodden of the Afro-American community.

Titles and Leadership Status Competition

The sudden rise of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the early 1960s created a great deal of concern among leaders of the trail-blazer Afro-American organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League and CORE. Not ever since the rise of Garvey and his UNIA had the United States witnessed another large mass movement of protest.

Although the leader of this new mass movement of protest did not carry titles other than President of SCLC, often the legally earned academic title was stressed in the American press. This gave rise to headings such as "Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," a situation that certainly existed during Booker T. Washington's times.

The many years of study of the leadership of the Afro-American community have turned the rift opposing Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. DuBois into a classic theme. The general scholarly consensus about this rift is that while Washington equated the social salvation of the Afro-American with the acquisition of an industrial (vocational) education, DuBois argued for training of a "Talented Tenth" which would provide the needed leadership for social salvation.[13]

Although most scholars and writers dealing with this rift have tended to emphasize the differences in positional tac-

tics between the two men, nonetheless it is fair to argue DuBois was strongly appalled by the due recognition given to Washington by the white community in the title of "leader of Negro Community."

That this was the case is readily inferable from Harold Issacs' statement that, "in writing the history of the Pan African Movement, W.E.B. DuBois blatantly omitted the impact of Henry Sylvester Williams as the "Father of the Pan African Movement." [14] What this is saying is that DuBois had wanted to attribute to himself all the credit for the Pan African activities.

Further, in the study of the relationship between DuBois and Garvey, many scholars have underscored the fact that DuBois was very wary of the tremendous success recorded by Garvey within the community, especially, among the members of the lower class.

In point of fact, DuBois had once described Garvey as a megalomanic West Indian who exploited the emotions, despair and obscurantism of the Afro-American masses, alluring them into his organization through the fetish of titles and uniforms. At this point, it is only reasonable to advance the view that the virulent attacks launched by DuBois against Garvey in which the issue of nationality played a significant role (the issue of jurisdictional right to leadership) may have been triggered by the fact that DuBois, in spite of the recognition he enjoyed as an intellectual leader of the Afro-American community, was only appointed and given the title of "Executive Press Secretary" of the NAACP. In contrast, Garvey, who did not have the same academic credentials behind him, succeeded in being acclaimed as an important political leader to the extent that he was portrayed in the media as the "Black Messiah and Black Moses."

In the context of the frantic scramble for larger followings within the lower class Afro-Americans, Garvey's fetish of titles and uniforms had, as time went by, to measure up to the mystification efforts of the Father Divine Peace Mission Movement. George Baker, in moving from the status of Messenger of God to the status of Father Divine (i.e. Providence or God) took away many of the followers of Garvey.

Where and how George Baker succeeded in offering a sizeable competition against Garvey and his UNIA, is equally where and how Muhammad entered into a staunch competition against the Father Divine Peace Mission. The demise of UNIA, following the deportation of Marcus Garvey, left many of the adherents of the back-to-Africa movement in search of meaningful leadership. The self-erection of Muhammad into Prophet and Messenger of a non-white God (Allah) created the opportune climate. Many of the leaderless Garveyites joined the Nation of Islam. With this numerical backing, and in his self-acclaimed capacity as leader of the Black man, Muhammad exerted himself to eclipse Baker from his position of greater visibility, especially when it became more and more apparent that the Peace Mission Movement was starting to attract not only white men but also "better educated but less scrupulous individuals who saw it as an irresistible opportunity for private gains and exploitation." [15] Within this line of thought, C. L. R. James described George Baker as a "little rascal" who fed dead chicken to his followers and got rich off their contributions.[16]

This scramble for leadership, by way of mystification of the masses of the lower class Afro-Americans through the use of social etiquettes such as titles has, without any doubt, carried very serious implications insofar as the immediate crucial problems of the Afro-American community were concerned. The tendency toward higher self-visibility, in close contrast with the interests of the masses to be served, has in more than one way clouded the real issues at hand—allowing thus the white community to advantageously reap the fruits of disunity.

Titles and the Masses

Writing in the 1960s, Kenneth Clark, educator and psychologist, argued that the proliferation of political organizations within the Afro-American community was not a sign of political weakness. It only symbolized the fact of democratization of the leadership.[17]

That there were many who disagreed with this assessment is hardly subject to serious debate, as it is generally accepted that "in unity there is strength and in disunity weakness." In addition to this common saying, Clark's position is also vulnerable in that it made the ultimate goal aimed at by all the movements of protest as its only concern, while failing to take cognizance of the impact of the leaders' idiosyncracies upon the rise of these organizations.

Denied avenues for self-actualization within the mainstream of the American society, some Afro-Americans saw the Afro-American community as their jurisdictionally-assigned fief to cultivate and to toil.

Whereas the feudal society lords at the onset owned their titles from the King or band leader, in the American society, the government as legitimate figure of authority left the right of investiture to the Afro-Americans themselves. In some cases, however, the government made its pronouncements about such and such person, thus legitimizing his right to title and leadership. But such cases were the exception rather than the rule (Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King).

As a result, the relationship between the government and the Afro-Americans as the governed often became meaningless. The recognition of the blatant disinterest of the government in the plight of the Afro-American community forced the Afro-Americans, in most instances, to do some things as they saw fit.

In this way, the search for titles became a highly valued social activity. The white community as a political majority had its President, its Senators and Congressmen while the religious white community had its Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and Rabbis. To respond to this challenge, some leaders within the Afro-American community proclaimed themselves Presidents of, Ministers of, Party Chairmen, Prophets and Messengers of God or Allah.

Whereas in the white community, titles were used as measures of sanctionally accepted levels of achievement, in the Afro-American community titles were, more often than not, products of strong idiosyncrasies seeking self-expression. Marcus Garvey, George Baker, W. D. Fard, and Elijah Muhammad saw themselves as Prophets, Messiahs and Saviours while the members of the Black Panther Party saw themselves as Ministers of an eventually self-determined political unit (concept of community control).

The soundess of their programs with regard to the ultimate goals of justice and first-class citizen status was often offset by the great divisions brought in the Afro-American community. This was partly the result of their efforts aimed at capitalizing on the fetish of titles and other social indices in order to carve out for themselves either a county or a duchy inside the Afro-American community as a large isolated fief.

The mass of followers, usually of lower class origins, became pawns on a chessboard frequently pitted against one another on the basis of a political program or on the basis of a religious message.

II. The African Experience

Africa has become, in a lapse of few years of independence, a potpourri of social phenomena. Some of these phenomena, though of a universal character, have acquired within the modern African context, a very peculiar significance. A case in point is the issue of titles.

In an article, "The Monarchical Tendency in African Political Culture," Ali Mazuri painted African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah as psychopaths, suffering from fits of megalomania and self-aggrandizement, often manifested through the process of title self-attribution.[18]

Although Mazuri meant to exercise well his role of writer and intellectual as a pointer and guardian of the good ways in the society, he went perhaps too far in his apparent attempts to live up to his role.

With regard to the late leader of Ghana for instance, the real problem lay in the fact that he was unable to refrain members of his entourage from bestowing adultatory attributes upon him.

In fact, the noted historian and Pan African activist, C. L. R. James, advised Nkrumah on several occasions not to let the people erect statues in his honor during his lifetime. He constantly reminded him of the centuries of oppression and humiliation suffered by the Black people by persistently pressing upon him the idea that the money used to build monuments in his honor could well have been used to provide services to the masses or even to fight colonialism in Africa.[19]

All things considered, there is, however, a dialectical twist in the use of titles in the modern African context which must be fully grasped so as not to fall in the trap of reductionist explanations, such as Mazuri's psychopathic approach.

Titles and the European Presence

Many African leaders have, since independence, acquired or attributed to themselves titles such as "Father of the Nation," "Brigadier General," "Field Marshall," and "Emperor." The *raison d'etre* for this trend lies, to some extent, in the European imperialistic ventures in Africa and their aftermath. In essence, the tendency represents a genuine desire on the part of these leaders to continue the fight for racial equality with whites and against racial denigration.

In the hey-days of "Scramble for Africa" (1880s), the Europeans sought to legitimize the colonization and enslavement of the Africans by denying them both moral and intellectual qualities. As a result, they looked upon them as racially inferior.[20] This then set the stage for the politics of racial sneers.

In late 1400s, the Portuguese explorers and traders had dealt with Africans as their equals, calling, for instance, African rulers *Kings*. In the 1800s, however, the British, French, Germans, Belgians—even the Portuguese—began to consider Africans as sub-humans, calling their rulers by the derogatory epithet of *Chiefs*.

The implementation of the colonial systems, in the early 1900s, led to either the complete elimination or the vile debasement of the traditional African rulers.

The French, for one, devised a new administrative system of hand-picked "Chefs" whose sole function was to collect head taxes. On the other hand, the British in an apparent effort to compensate for the unwillingness of the Britons to serve as civil servants in inhospitable lands, turned traditional rulers into "Paramount Chiefs," directly accountable to the white District Commissioners.

Equally, ignoring all the rules of good scholarship, American and European social scientists sought to rationalize these colonial moves by pointing out that there was no political system in Africa before the arrival of Europeans. In this same vein, Leslie Rubin and Brian Weinstein observed that "the American and European scholars looked for houses of parliament or pillared marble supreme court buildings, and there were no Congressional Record, Hansard or Journal Officiel. The political scientist usually shared the prejudices of his own society that may have participated in the conquest of colonies in Africa or taken slaves from the continent. And by denying that there could be any indigenous political systems in Africa, he helped the colonial process and helped justify the sometimes inhuman treatment to which Africans were subjected." [21]

In all this, the emasculation of the African traditional rulers was only one side of the coin in the campaign of racial sneers against the Africans. There was also what can be called a program of "castration" within the colonial administrative and military services. The "upper limit policy" was in full force in both of these areas.[22]

Within the colonial administrative setting, the Africans could only serve as all-to-do petty clerks, removed from the center of the decision-making process. Their principal duties were restricted to helping white administrators carry out their daily

administrative tasks. With a few exceptions of people like Lamine Ngueye [23] and Diallo Telli,[24] most Africans were relegated to the role of "male typists." In one word, they were denied access to the higher echelons of the colonial administrative apparatus.

Within the colonial military organization, on the other hand, the Africans were only used as porters, executioners and "force de choc." Through the ranks, the highest levels they could reach were Sergeant and, in some cases, Staff Sergeant.

There is an array of examples of African leaders which speaks of this state of affairs: President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, ex-President Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, President Etienne Eyadema of Togo and ex-Emperor Jean Bedel Bokassa of Central Africa. To this pattern, there were a few exceptions such as General A. Dodds, a Senegalese mulatto who was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the French forces fighting against King Behanzin of Dahomey in the early 1900s.[25]

Against this background fraught with racism and racial injustices has emerged a counter-reaction, a fermentation as well as a revolt that has sought expression through nationalism first, and then through symbolic acts geared towards the uplifting of the African and his race.

While the nationalist current has sometimes brought along outbursts of violence (Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, for instance) in the road to political rehabilitation (independence), symbolic acts such as self-attribution of long denied titles have been targeted at restoring the Africa sense of self-worth.

Thus, beyond the acts of Nkrumah proclaiming himself "Father of the Ghanian Nation, and African Independence," Mobutu "Lt. General," Amin "Field Marshall" and Bokassa "Emperor," there is more than just an exhibition of fits of megalomania. What these acts are saying is that irrespective of whether the titles suit the self-attributing party or not, the African is now master of his own social destiny.

In this way, if V. I. Lenin can be called the "Father of Modern Russia" and George Washington the "Father of the American Nation," why can't Nkrumah be called the "Father of the Ghanian Nation and African Independence"?

Titles and Leadership Status Competition

Long denied to the African by the colonial masters, titles have become in the hands of the new African leaders a competitive tool for leadership status. The competition is seen much more so among military leaders than among civilian leaders. This is because military leaders come from an organizational apparatus in which status and prestige are closely dependent upon rank and title. In fact, the first thing military officers of any rank do upon taking power from either civilians or other military leaders is to promote themselves to the highest rank.

Whatever highest rank they promote themselves to is, in turn, function of the existing classificatory grades. If, for instance, the existing highest rank is the rank of captain, they then promote themselves to the rank of major. This was most common in the French speaking countries. Captain Marien Ngouabi in the Peoples' Republic of the Congo became Major Marien Ngouabi. If, on the other hand, the existing highest rank is the rank of colonel, they then promote themselves to the rank of General. This was most common in the English speaking countries. Colonel Afrifa in Ghana became General Afrifa.

It ought to be noted that the promotional acts do not stop at this point, however. They are continued, contingent upon the number of years in power. The more years the said military officers stay in power, the more decrees they sign to prop themselves up to the summit of the military title gamut.

For instance, Bokassa, unable to find another conventionally accepted military rank beyond the rank of "Marechal" (Field Marshall), proclaimed himself Emperor.

In addition to being a purely symbolic promotional act, the crowning of "Marechal" Bokassa as Emperor on December 4, 1977, has brought along a wave of serious protocol problems within the African diplomatic circles.

Historically and traditionally, more deference was due to emperors than to kings and other secular leaders including modern leaders such as presidents, heads of states and governments. In light of this, serious questions have arisen among African leaders with respect to how to deal with the newly crowned emperor.

Unlike the self-attributed titles of "General, Field Marshall etc.—," the title of "Emperor" has, until Haile Selassie's demise and subsequent death, carried a certain aura of historical pride, glamour and legitimacy.

Haile Selassie was a duly recognized and highly respected figure, claiming a long descendence from the biblical King Solomon. He was, indeed, acclaimed as one of the few remaining figures of royalty in the modern world. For instance, at the time of the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963, most African leaders from the newly independent countries agreed, by deference to Haile Selassie, to seat the organization at Addis Ababa, even though Ethiopians, in the past, did not identify with the rest of Black Africa.

By diametrical opposition to this background, the Bokassa crowning posed severe problems of pride and legitimacy in Africa. Paradoxically, it has been alleged that Bokassa took the decision of proclaiming himself "Emperor" because Africa badly needed a replacement for Haile Selassie.[26] The crowning was then an act of self-pride for Africa, given the fact that some countries in Asia still had their traditional figures of "royal" authority.

To be sure, the crowning was more than a mere act of self-pride for Africa. In addition to attempting to emulate Napoleon Bonaparte, Bokassa was very weary of the

leadership status competition posed to him by his juniors (chronological age) such as Mobutu and Amin.

Bokassa was the first African military leader to proclaim himself "Marechal" (Field Marshall). In 1972, Mobutu, who had earlier promoted himself to the rank of Lt. General, sought to dismantle the "Union Douaniere et Economique de L'Afrique Centrale" (UDEAC),[27] encompassing then Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Central Africa Republic and Chad, by proposing a new and greater economic union, the "Union de l'Afrique Centrale," (UAC).[28]

To this new proposal, only the Central African Republic and Chad responded favorably, as pressures were put by the French to dissuade Cameroon, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville from leaving UDEAC.

The new economic union, the UAC, was short-lived, however. There were two important reasons: 1) continued pressure upon Chad and the Central African Republic, as the French sought to counter-attack the American influence in Equatorial Africa; 2) diplomatic blunders by Mobutu *vis a vis* the Central African Republic.

Far from underestimating the impact of the first reason, this study is, however, of the strong opinion that the second reason had, by far, the greatest impact upon the failure of UAC. President Mobutu in an apparent effort to emerge as the "big brother" of the new union, advised his embassy staff in Bangui [29] to promote the creation of a MPR [30] branch in the Central African Republic.

This move infuriated then President for life Bokassa who felt that Mobutu, his junior, was seeking to slap him in the face by meddling into the internal affairs of an equal and sister republic. As a result, Bokassa decided to leave UAC and rejoin UDEAC. It was then, also, that he had decided to promote himself to the rank of "Marechal" by way of proving that Motubu was still his junior.

Later, the decision by Amin to promote himself to the rank of "Field Marshall" brought further military status competition and threats to Bokassa. He simply proclaimed himself "Emperor" of the Central African Empire.

Hence, unlike the first context in which self-attributed titles must be looked upon as devices for continued struggle for racial equality with former colonial masters, in this second context self-attributed titles rather carry overtones of self-aggrandizement.

Titles and the Masses

In the midst of this continued struggle for racial equality and of this leadership status competition stand the African masses. To them, titles were symbols earned through great deeds, eliciting, as a result, great feelings of deference and praise for the titleholders. Today, however, titles have become the exclusive property of a new set of leaders who, more often than not, are not worthy of them.

Mainly because they lack the necessary avenues for bringing pressure to bear upon this new set of leaders, the masses tacitly or passively sanction the self-attribution of titles, especially in those cases where they are not coerced into singing the praises of such and such leaders. Where ethnicity becomes an important variable in the distribution and wielding of political power, the ethnic members of given leaders in power become often the staunch defenders of these titles.

As a general rule, some of the leaders attribute to themselves most of these impressive titles out of a strong realization that the African masses had in the past displayed a great deal of respect for symbols of authority such as titles. For instance, among the Igbos, political power was wielded through a council of titleholders. And titleholders were due the greatest respect largely because they were men who had achieved status through important deeds and accomplishments.[31]

During the colonial period in particular, the Governor, the District Commissioner, the School Inspector, the Bishop, all inspired awe and deference among the African masses. Moreover, names such as Queen Elizabeth and General Charles de Gaulle incarnated in the minds of the African masses the epitome of authority and power.

Thus, titles such as "Father of the Nation," "Brigadier General" and "Emperor" have been resorted to by some leaders as manipulative devices for instilling sentiments of respect and deference in the masses. As a concomitant, they have been turned into powerful tools for socializing these masses into accepting and legitimizing the authority of the parties in power.

The likely danger here is the rise of personality cult programs, especially when the quest for legitimacy leads the individuals in power to manipulate the traditional symbols of authority such as the stool in Ghana and leopard skin trappings in Zaire. Recently, for instance, Mobutu has been seen coming down from the clouds on the Zairian television broadcast. He is cast, respectively, wearing a leopard skin hat and holding a cane.

At this point, it can be said that unlike the second context in which the process of title self-attribution was uncontestably geared towards self-aggrandizement, in this third context self-attributed titles, in addition to reflecting megalomaniac tendencies, serve a much greater political role, the role of authority legitimization.

III. Conclusion

This study was conceived as an effort to examine, juxtapositionally, the use of titles (Western style) within and by the Afro-American and Black African communities.

It was not conceived as a comparative study for two main reasons. First, the use of titles (Western style) had a much longer historical precedent in the Afro-American community than in the African community. Second, both the Afro-American and African communities were so disparate in that the issue of center and periphery did not arise in the Afro-

American community as it did in the African community.

The Afro-American, whether well-educated or not, was living in greater close contact with the white community and experienced, technically speaking, no linguistic isolation from the white community. On the other hand, the African was either an elite who dealt directly with the colonial masters or an illiterate who had an indirect and sometimes even no contact at all with the colonial masters.

All in all, the goal of this study was twofold: to show how the Afro-American and the Black African reached a commonality of viewpoints with regard to the use of titles (Western style) as a result of the historical accident of cultural contact (Europe and African); to argue that titles played and continue to play a contradictory role in the affairs of the Afro-American and Black African communities.

As tools of the struggle against continued domination and oppression by the white man and thus as tools for the self assertion of the Black man, titles played a very significant psycho-political role. In addition, titles served to spiritually unite the members of the Afro-American and African communities against the array of prejudicial stereotypes of the Blacks by the whites.

Opposed to this role is the purely psycho-social role. Titles in the second instance, became associated with the notions of personal self-aggrandizement and disunity. As tools for gauging relational behavior first among leaders within each of these communities, and then between the leaders and the masses, titles often created climates for leadership status competition in which the interests of the masses were sacrificed and the prospects for the realization of the ultimate goal of the struggle weakened. □

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21. Leslie Rubin, and Brian Weinstein, *Introduction to African Politics, A Continental Approach* (New York: Praeger 1974), p. 11.

22. This concept was first used by George Balandier in an article, "The Concept of Colonialism."

23. Lamine Ngueye was the first Black African to earn a doctorate in law from the University of Paris (Sorbonne) in the early part of the 1900s. He was from Senegal, and served as the first President of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Senegal.

24. Diallo Telli of Guinea served as "Chef de Cabinet" to the Governor-General in Saigon during the colonial era. It is the equivalent in English of "Chief Private Assistant."

25. Jean Coradin, Behanzin. (Washington, D. C.: The Three Continents Press, forthcoming).

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27. UDEAC is a customs and economic union left by the French and serving the Republics of Cameroon, Gabon, the Congo, and the Central African Empire. Until 1972, the Republic of Chad was an integral part of it.

28. UAC was intended to be both a political and economic union under the leadership of the Republic of Zaire. It was designed to encompass the Republics of Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Gabon, the Central African Empire and Zaire.

29. Bangui is the Capital of the Central African Empire.

30. MPR is the ruling political party of Zaire. (Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution or the Popular Movement of the Revolution).

31. Leslie Rubin and Brian Weinstein, *op. cit.* p. 21.